

Niche construction as a theoretical tool in the ethnographic analysis from a naturalistic perspective

Abstract

In this work, we intend to move discussion forward on the heuristic role of the concept of niche construction for the review of the human/environment dichotomy by considering the interaction between biotic and abiotic components in specific environments. In this sense, we will examine an ethnographic case study which explores the perception of the landscape and its use by different ethnic groups that inhabit a territory with common biophysical features: the *Paranaense* forest in Northeastern Argentina. Therefore, we will build on a research carried out by one of us which describes and accounts for different forms of domestication of the *monte* through the narratives of two distinct groups: Mbyá-Guaraní inhabitants and the descendants of European settlers, both currently established in the region of the Cuña Pirú Valley in the Province of Misiones, Argentina. According to these narratives, the consideration of the *monte* by both groups is closely related to the modes of interaction with the natural environment resulting from their daily subsistence practices. From a comparative ethnographic exploration, it can be clearly seen how the *monte* is differentially built and valued in the course of this interaction.

Regarding the concept of niche construction, two basic types of subsistence practices can be mentioned: *a)* the strategy carried out by Guaraní communities, who are linked to the *monte* through an action of coexistence, namely a non-destructive one, and *b)* the strategy conducted by the *colonos*, who build another type of niche by destroying the previous one (deforestation) for crop and livestock production. In both cases, livelihood probabilities of future generations can become predictable.